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SEASONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR RURAL YOUTH IN RURAL AREAS.

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RURAL YOUTH ARE BEING UTILIZED IN ONE CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY TO ALLEVIATE A SHORTAGE OF WORKERS FOR SEASONAL FARM JOBS. NINETY FIVE BOYS BETWEEN THE AGES OF SIXTEEN AND TWENTY WERE ENROLLED IN A TWO DAY FAMILIARIZATION AND SAFETY COURSE ON ORCHARD EQUIPMENT. THE SPECIFIC PURPOSE WAS FOR ORIENTATION AND NOT TO PRODUCE EXPERIENCED EQUIPMENT OPERATORS. THE CROP GROWERS OF THE COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERED THEIR TIME AND EQUIPMENT FOR THE ORIENTATION COURSE. IN ADDITION TO CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION THE BOYS WERE GIVEN A THIRTY MINUTE INSTRUCTIONAL PERIOD WITH EACH OF THE VARIOUS PIECES OF EQUIPMENT USED IN HARVESTING THE CROPS. THE GROWERS REPORTED THAT BOYS WHO RECEIVED THIS TRAINING EARNED FROM \$1.40 TO \$3.00 PER HOUR, WITH SOME EARNING AS MUCH AS \$700.00 DURING THE SEASON. THIS SPEECH WAS PRESENTED AT THE NATIONAL OUTLOOK CONFERENCE ON RURAL YOUTH, OCTOBER 23-26, 1967, WASHINGTON, D. C., SPONSORED JOINTLY BY THE U. S. DEPARTMENTS OF AGRICULTURE, HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE, INTERIOR, AND LABOR, OEO, AND THE PRESIDENT'S COUNCIL ON YOUTH OPPORTUNITY. (ES)

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Special Session on Employment of Rural Youth in Rural and Urban Areas

Speech presented at
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SEASONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR RURAL YOUTH IN RURAL AREAS

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I too am pleased to have the opportunity to take part in this National Outlook Conference on Rural Youth.

Dr. Dowler described typical career opportunities in agriculture and agribusiness and he also mentioned in his talk that seasonal work in agriculture will continue to provide many job opportunities for both rural and urban youth, and I agree. Since the demise of Public Law 78, which provided large numbers of Mexican nationals for seasonal farm work, California farmers have begun to rely much more heavily on youth for their summer activities. I would like to take a few moments to give some dimension to the employment of youth in California's agricultural industry, and to describe a community program--a program designed to provide inexperienced youth with the orientation and training needed to perform farm harvest tasks, and to provide farmers with a work force to harvest crops which might otherwise been lost.

First, something about the importance of youth in agriculture in California. As you may know, farm workers in California (along with most other workers) have been covered by non-occupational disability insurance for several years. The Disability Insurance Program is funded and administered by a one percent tax on the worker's earnings, which is deducted by the employer and submitted quarterly. Using these quarterly reports, and with the cooperation of Social Security people in Baltimore, we have compiled some interesting figures. For example, in 1965 there were about 203,000 youth under 22 years of age who had earnings in California agriculture. They earned a total of nearly 83 million dollars, or an average of about \$408 each. Of course, some of these youth under 22 are young adult breadwinners; however, 69,000 youth under 17 had earnings reported in agriculture, with average earnings of \$214 each during 1965. These figures give some idea of the importance of youth in the agricultural industry of California.

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Now let me briefly describe a rural community program aimed toward the use of youth for seasonal farm work. We all know that mechanization of many crop activities such as cotton and sugar beet harvesting has reduced the demand for labor. However, because most fruit cannot be harvested mechanically, mechanization in fruit has largely been restricted to mechanical aids, such as fork lift tractors, conveyor belts, low bed trailers, etc.

In one northern California community where growers have historically had difficulty in finding enough experienced equipment operators for their peach harvest, they decided to look to youth to solve the problem.

An orientation class was designed through the cooperative efforts of the Farm Bureau, the Farm Labor Service, the Junior College, the High School Vo-Ag Department, local growers and local equipment dealers. Through these community groups and agencies, 95 boys between the ages of 16 and 20 were recruited and given a two-day familiarization and safety course on orchard equipment.

The boys were given four hours of classroom instruction on tractor safety, maintenance and familiarization, and given orientation lectures designed to let them know what their prospective employers would expect of them in terms of dependability and responsibility. The trainees were encouraged to ask questions to assure their full understanding of what employers expected.

In addition to the classroom sessions, each boy was given the opportunity to spend at least one half hour operating each piece of equipment. The athletic field at the local school was the practice course for the trainees. They were instructed by local growers and Farm Labor Service personnel in the proper way to load and unload trucks using a hi-lift tractor, how to handle and stack pallet bins with lo-lifts, allowed to practice backing a bin trailer through an obstacle course, and to pull bin trailers through a pattern of wooden stakes set out to simulate trees in an orchard. As each boy was operating a piece of equipment, under the guidance of an instructor, he was being graded on a point scale to establish his level of competency. This scale was used in choosing the right boy for the right job as orders were placed during the season.

I want to emphasize that these boys were not experienced equipment operators at the completion of the course. They were only given basic familiarization with a variety of equipment, with the final training to be done on the job by the employer. All instruction was conducted without special financial support, with grower-instructors volunteering their time. Growers and implement dealers volunteered the use of the equipment.

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Growers report that boys who received this training earned from \$1.40 to \$3.00 per hour with many boys making \$700 or more during the season.

This is one example of the continuing opportunity for youth in seasonal farm jobs--an opportunity to gain valuable experience and earn the money to gain the education needed to take advantage of the career opportunities which Dr. Dowler described.